

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

22nd CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 31, 2003

HINCHEY ASSAILS CUTS TO VETERANS' PROGRAMS

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey today called on President Bush and Republican congressional leaders to back off their proposal of \$28.8 billion in cuts to veterans' programs in order to finance an unnecessary, unaffordable tax cut for the wealthy.

"This budget sends the wrong signal to the brave men and women fighting in Iraq," Hinchey said. "We have a responsibility to provide them with the highest quality health care and compensation for disabilities that they may live with for the rest of their lives. It is the essential promise our society makes to those who serve in our military, but Republicans seem determined to break that promise in order to ensure that the wealthiest one percent of Americans get a sizeable tax cut."

In order to finance the \$724 billion tax cut proposed by the president, House Republican leaders on March 21 pushed through a budget resolution that forced devastating cuts to veterans' benefits, Medicaid, education, and the environment, while shortchanging urgent homeland security needs. Among the most severe cuts included in the Republican budget plan were \$14.6 billion in cuts to mandatory veterans' programs and \$14.2 billion in cuts to discretionary veterans' programs. Mandatory veterans' programs include pensions, compensation for service-connected disabilities and the GI bill. The overwhelming majority of discretionary spending for veterans is comprised of health care expenditures.

Hinchey criticized the Republican leaders for making very public expressions of support for troops in combat in the Middle East, while cutting late-night deals to deny them quality health care and compensation for their injuries when they return.

"It's fine to wave the flag when you are sending troops off to war, but you must be waving the flag when you welcome them home," said Hinchey. "There are several hundred thousand young men and women in combat in the Persian Gulf. They are on the front lines of this war and, sadly, many of them will return home injured. Republican proposals to cut more than \$28 billion from the most essential veterans' programs dishonor the sacrifices that our servicemen and women are making."

Hinchey voted for an alternative budget proposal that would have provided \$32 billion more for veterans' programs than the Republican budget, but that plan was voted down. The Senate voted to cut the Bush tax cut proposal in half, but still required substantial cuts. The two chambers will begin negotiating this week on a compromise bill, which Hinchey vowed to oppose if it includes any cuts to veterans' programs.